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PHILIPPINE LITERATURE

BY FRANK R. BLAKE

THE native population of the Philippine Islands is made up of a number of different tribes, which fall naturally into three groups, *viz.*:

- a. The mountain pagan tribes, including the dwarf-like Negritos, doubtless the aboriginal inhabitants of the archipelago.
- b. The Mohammedan Moros of Sulu and Mindanao.
- c. The Christian tribes, the Indios or Filipinos of the Spaniards, who form the bulk of the population.

All these tribes, with the possible exception of the Negritos, speak languages which belong to the same linguistic family, the Malayo-Polynesian or Indonesian, embracing the languages spoken on almost all of the islands of the Pacific, on the Malay peninsula, and on the distant island of Madagascar. Every tribe, however, in each of these different groups, has its own language, distinct from those of its neighbors.

These languages have produced little or nothing which can claim to be literature in the sense of elegant and artistic writing. The literature of the Philippine languages is literature only in the broader sense of written speech, and it is in this sense that the term "Philippine Literature" is used in the present paper.

Few of the languages of the pagan tribes exist at all in written form. The Tagbánwas of Palawan, the long, narrow island stretching from Borneo towards Luzon, and their northern neighbors, the Mangyans of Mindoro, possess native alphabets, but these are probably not employed except for short inscriptions.¹ All other works in the languages of this group are printed in Roman type and are practically all of a religious character, being written by various

¹ Cf. A. B. Meyer; A. Schadenberg; and W. Foy, *Die Mangianschrift von Mindoro*, Berlin, 1895; F. Blumentritt, *Die Mangianschrift von Mindoro*, Braunschweig, 1896.

missionaries for the conversion and religious edification of different pagan tribes. Only five languages possess any written monuments, and none of these more than one or two specimens. Of special interest is the work of a member of the Tiruray tribe of Mindanao in Spanish and Tiruray, on the customs of his fellow-tribesmen.¹

The two principal languages of the Mohammedan tribes or Moros are Sulu, which is spoken mainly in the domains of the Sultan of Sulu on the chain of small islands extending from Mindanao to Borneo, and Magindanaw, the speech of the most powerful tribe on the large island of Mindanao.

The Moros² are unacquainted with the art of printing, their literary monuments being all in manuscript form, written in a slightly modified variety of the Arabic alphabet, similar to that used by the Malays of the Malay peninsula.

Their writings may be classified under four heads:

a. Historical annals, more or less legendary, consisting principally of genealogies of the *datos* or Moro chiefs.

b. Legal codes, based on various collections of Arabic law.

c. Religious texts, translations of the Kuran and its commentaries, of the Hadith or traditions regarding Mohammed, orations for the different Mohammedan festivals, etc.

d. Writings of varied character, stories, magic-texts, letters of the different *datos*, etc.

Almost all Moro manuscripts begin, just as most Arabic books do, with the Arabic phrase *bismi 'llâhi 'rrahmâni 'rrahîmi*, "in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful." This is usually followed by a sentence or two in Malay. The Moros derive their learning from Arabic and Malay sources, and consequently take pride in airing their Arabic and Malay erudition.

Practically all Moro books are thus written by the Moros themselves. There is but one work, so far as I know, in a Moro language written by a foreigner, a printed catechism of Christian doctrine in Spanish and Magindanaw by a Jesuit missionary.

¹ J. Tenorio (a Sigayán), *Costumbres de los indios tirurayes*, Manila, 1892 (two columns, Spanish and Tiruray).

² Cf. N. M. Saleeby, *Studies in Moro History, Law, Religion*, Ethnol. Survey Pubs., Dept. of Interior, vol. iv, part 1, Manila, 1905.

The Christian tribes constitute by far the most important element of the native population, both on account of their numbers and the comparatively high degree of civilization to which they have attained. The various tribes, while speaking distinct languages, have practically the same characteristics and customs, and really form one people.

At the time of the Spanish discovery and conquest, in the 16th century, the now Christianized Filipinos possessed native alphabets similar to those still used by the Tagbánwas of Palawan, and the Mangyans of Mindoro. There are notices of native Mss. in at least one Spanish writer,¹ but none of these have been preserved to our day, all existing works dating from the Spanish period. Moreover, even the ancient alphabets have been forgotten. All Philippine books with, so far as I know, but one exception, being printed in Roman type. This unique work, published in 1621, is an Ilokan catechism printed in Tagalog characters by the Austin friar Francisco Lopez.

The number of works published in the various languages of the Christian tribes down to 1903, according to the best bibliographies, 1898 and 1903 respectively,² is approximately as follows. Bisayan and Tagalog stand first with something under 300 works each. The next in rank, Ilokan, has less than half that number. They follow, in a descending scale, Bikol with about 60, Pangasinan about 30, Pampanga 19, Ibanag 12, Kuyo 6, Zambal 3, Batan and Kalamian 1 each. In all there are about 800 works in the eleven languages here mentioned.

These books are of all sizes varying from small pamphlets of nine or ten pages to quarto volumes of six and seven hundred. The numbers here given, especially in the case of Tagalog and Bisayan, have probably been considerably augmented in the last few years.³

¹ Cf. *Report of Philippine Commission*, 1900, III, p. 403.

² W. E. Retana, *Catálogo abreviado de la biblioteca filipina*, Madrid, 1898; T. H. Pardo de Tavera, *Biblioteca Filipina*, Washington, 1903.

³ In Retana's latest bibliography, *Aparato bibliográfica de la historia general de Filipinas*, 3 vols., Madrid, 1906, the only works in the native languages listed from 1903 to 1905 (about 25) are in Tagalog.

The works written in these various languages are composed in both prose and verse, the verse being apparently of native origin.

Tagalog verse,¹ which may serve as an example, consists of lines containing the same number of syllables, and the ends of the lines in the same stanza must be in assonance with each other according to certain definite principles. The final syllables of all the lines of a stanza must have the same vowel, whether this vowel is final or is followed by a consonant. Of words ending in a consonant, there are two classes, those ending in *p, b, t, d, k, g, s*, and those ending in *l, m, n, ng, y, w*. Any word of one class may be used in assonance with any other word of that class, provided the vowel is the same, but words of the two classes can not be used together in the same stanza. For example *bondók* 'mountain,' ending in *k*, may be used in assonance with *lóob* 'heart,' ending in *b*, and *mahál* 'noble' ending in *l* with *biláng* 'number,' ending in the guttural nasal *ng*. It is to be noted that the words of the first class end in stop sounds or the spirant *s*, i. e., in noised sounds, sounds accompanied by considerable friction of the escaping air, while the words of the second class all end in what are known as sonorous sounds, sounds made with little audible friction, and are characterized by greater resonance of the speech organs. Words with final vowel also fall into two classes, those with simple vowel, e. g., *táwo* 'man,' and those with so-called guttural vowel, i. e., a vowel followed by the glottal catch, e. g., *walâ* 'not having.' Words of one of these classes can not be used in assonance with those of the other, nor can a word ending in either kind of vowel stand in assonance with a word having a final consonant. The difference between these two classes of vocalic endings is also apparently a difference in sonorousness, a simple vowel being more sonorous than one followed by the glottal catch. The principal Tagalog meters consist of seven, eight, twelve, or fourteen syllables to a verse, and three, four, five, or eight verses to a stanza.

The great majority of the works written in the languages of this group, at least five-sixths, are of a religious character, written

¹ Cf. W. G. Seiple, *Tagalog Poetry*, JHU Circs., Vol. xxii, No. 163, June, 1903, pp. 78-79.

by the friars of the various orders for the instruction and edification of their flocks, for in the Philippine Islands under the Spanish regime, the friars had become the occupants of practically all the parishes in the archipelago to the exclusion of the native secular priests. This was one of the chief causes of the antagonism of the people towards the religious orders. Many of these religious works are simply translations from the Spanish. All the works in Kuyo, Zambal, Calamian, and Batan are religious, and in all the other languages except Tagalog books of a secular character are very rare; for example Bisayan and Ilokan which rank next to Tagalog in this respect have about a dozen each. These religious works consist of catechisms and manuals of Christian doctrine, books on deportment, lives of the saints, collections of sermons, novenas or series of nine days prayer to some saint, etc., the novenas being by far the most numerous.

The class of writings which stands next to the religious works in point of view of numbers, is the poetical romance or *corrido*, the latter term being a corruption of the Spanish *ocurrido*,¹ the passive participle of the verb *ocurrir* 'happen.' These are practically confined to Tagalog. They are remarkable tales of the adventures of royal or noble personages, usually in some remote or imaginary country, e. g., *Pinagdaánang búhay ni Don José Flores at nang princesa Virginia na anak nang háring Magaloaes sa Kahariang Turkia*, "The life of Don José Flores and the princess Virginia, daughter of king Magaloaes in the kingdom of Turkey"; or *Corrido at búhay na pinagdaánan nang principe Orontis at nang reinang Talestris sa kaharian nang Temisita*, "The story and life of prince Orontis and queen Talestris in the kingdom of Temisita."

The *corrido* entitled *Pinagdaánang búhay in Florante at ni Laura sa Kahariang Albania*, "Life of Florante and Laura in the kingdom of Albania," written in 1870 by Francisco Baltazar, a native of the former province of Laguna near Manila, is considered the best poem in Tagalog. It opens in the following style:

¹ The Spanish word, however, never means romance or tale.

- 1) Sa isáng madilím gúbat na mapangláo
dawág na matínkay waláng pagítan
hálos naghihírap ang kay Febong sílang
dumálao sa lóob na lubháng masúkal
- 2) Malalakíng káhoy ang inihahandóg
páwang dalamháti, kahapísa't longkót
húni pa nang íbon ay nakalulúnos
sa lálóng matimpí't nagsasayáng lóob
- 3) Tanáng mangá báging na namimilípít
sa sanḡá nang káhoy ay bálót nang tiník
may búlo ang búnḡa't naghibigáy sakít
sa kanḡino pa mang sumági't malápit.¹

"There was a dark and lonely wood, choked with thorny bejuco, into whose tangled interior the rays of the sun could scarcely pierce. Tall trees presaged trouble, sadness and melancholy; the song of the birds had a mournful sound even to the bravest and most joyous heart. All the vines which wound about the branches of the trees were encased in spines. Fruits hung rotting, threatening disease to whoever approached."

Dramatic productions, usually styled *comedias*, are found in Tagalog, Bisayan, and Ilokan. Their favorite theme is a contest for supremacy between some Christian and some Moro or Mohammedan state, in which the Christians are always victorious. This theme is a reflection of the long struggle which the Christian Filipinos had with their turbulent Moro (Mohammedan) neighbors on the south, the Sulus and Magindanaos. From the end of the 16th century, when the Spaniards first came in contact with the Moros, until the introduction of steam gun-boats about the middle of the last century, these bold pirates harried the coasts of the northern islands, just as in the Middle Ages the Northmen devastated the shores of Europe. For years neither property nor life was safe, and hundreds were carried away into slavery. It is but natural that these times of storm and stress should have left a lasting impression on the minds of the Filipinos, and that they should attempt to get even with their Mohammedan foes, if only on paper.

After the American conquest a number of plays were produced

¹ Notice the assonant syllables, *ao* (= *aw*), *an*, *ang*, *al*, in the first stanza; *og*, *ot*, *os*, *ob*, in the second; and *ii*, *ik*, *ii*, *ii*, in the third.

which were directed against the rule of the United States, the so-called "Seditious Drama." One of the best known of this class of plays is *Hindî akó patáy*, "I am not dead."

The corrido and the drama are both without doubt borrowed forms of literature, but not so the lyric poetry. Here we have, if anywhere, the germs of a literature in the narrower sense. Much of this poetry exists only in the mouths of the people, though some, principally Tagalog, has been written down. Like the poetry of Oriental peoples in general it is often difficult to understand. These poems are mostly short and epigrammatic, consisting frequently of but one stanza of three or four lines. The following will serve as examples:

may laláki masigyá,
ginóo kun tumugpá,
aitá kun sumalóngá.

"There are some valiant men
Who are great lords when they embark,
But Negritos when they come to land
(i. e., they are brave until it comes
to real fighting)."

púsò ko'y lulutanglútang
sa gitná nang kadagátan
ang áking tinitimbólang
títig nang matâ mo lámang

"My heart sways up and down like a float
In the midst of the sea,
The goal of my restless course
Is the gaze of thine eye alone."

The Filipinos are very fond of proverbs and riddles which are usually cast into poetic form. Many of their proverbs are borrowed from Spanish, e. g.,

kahíma't paramtán ang hayop na makhín,
magpakailán ma'y makhín kun tawágin.

"Though the monkey be clothed,
he will always be called a monkey."

This is the Spanish: *Aunque la mona se vista de seda mona se queda*. Many of the proverbs, however, are doubtless of native origin.

Examples of native riddles are:

Munting dagatdagátan,
Binabákod nang dangláy.
A little lake fringed with reeds [*i. e.*, the eye].
Nang umága'y tíkum pa
Nang mahápo'y nabuká.
At dawn its mouth is closed,
In the evening it is open [*i. e.*, a flower].

Newspapers and periodicals have been published in the three principal languages, Tagalog, Bisayan, and Ilokan. These are usually in two languages, a native dialect, and Spanish. Sometimes they are printed in parallel columns, native dialect and Spanish translation.

Portions of the New Testament, the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, have been translated into the principal languages under the auspices of the British and Foreign Bible Society. In all probability a translation of the whole Bible is contemplated.

Books belonging to departments of literature other than the preceding are comparatively rare and are found principally in Tagalog. There are grammars of Spanish in Tagalog, Bisayan, Ilokan, and Ibanag. Medical works, usually of a practical character, and a few legal treatises, are found in Tagalog and Bisayan.

Deserving of mention among the remaining works is a treatise in Tagalog on the Filipino national sport, the fighting of gamecocks, and the story *si tandáng Basio Makunat* "The Cock Basio Macunat," written by a Franciscan friar in 1885 in order to instil into the minds of the Filipinos the idea that it was best for them not to learn Spanish or attempt to become civilized, that the more ignorant a Filipino was, the happier he would be.

More than one third of all the works treated are anonymous, and the authors of the rest are men of comparatively little note. While many of these authors are Spaniards, a number are true native Filipinos. Francisco Baltazar, the author of "Florante and Laura," the best Tagalog poem, has already been mentioned. So far as I know this is his only production. The most prolific of the writers is one Mariano Perfecto, who composed about fifty different works

in Bisayan on religious subjects. Next to him ranks Joaquin Tuason, with twenty works in Tagalog, also of a religious character.

This brief sketch will serve to give some idea of the extent and character of works in the various Philippine languages. Whether these languages or any one of them will ever develop a real literature, is a question which only the future can answer.

Some persons, struck by the great resemblance which the various Philippine languages bear to one another, have thought it would be possible to fuse these languages into one, and form a sort of national compound language, but such an artificial scheme is certainly impracticable. If the Filipinos are destined ever to have a national language in which a national literature can be written, that language will almost surely be Tagalog, the language of the capital city, and of the most progressive race of the archipelago; a language admirably suited by its richness of form and its great flexibility for literary development, and needing but the master hand of some great native writer to make it realize its latent possibilities.

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